

WINTER 2015 EDITION 8

# Pulse

Proudly Serving Veterans  
of North Texas and  
Southern Oklahoma  
from locations in

Bonham  
Bridgeport  
Dallas  
Denton  
Fort Worth  
Granbury  
Greenville  
Sherman  
Tyler

## HIGH TECH

Weight Loss

Inside Tips from  
Veterans Who  
Work at VA

### COVER STORY:

## *35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Dallas*

Army Veteran **Samuel Hudson** from Kerens, Texas competed in handcycling.  
Read more about the Games on page 7!





Director's Message



Seeing the Results You Want

Recently, VANTHCS Director Jeff Milligan (left) had the chance to hear the story of World War II Prisoner of War and Air Force Veteran Ray Lemons. "On my eighth mission, I was shot down over Kassel, Germany on September 27, 1944. That particular mission [was] the worst mission that had ever happened to any bomb group during World War II. We lost 31 out of 35 planes," said Lemons.

**MyVA** is what we are calling our transformation from the current way of doing business to one that puts you, the Veteran, in control of how, when, and where you wish to be served.

Under this initiative, VA North Texas Health Care System is currently targeting access issues. Since last year, we hired 65 more physicians and 225 new nurses, opened a new outpatient clinic in Tyler, plan to open a new outpatient clinic in Plano in 2016, almost finished construction of a new parking garage at Dallas, and will start a third garage there soon. All of these changes and others have produced dramatic improvements in wait times for you to see a health care provider.

As of October 2015, more than 96 percent of appointments have been scheduled less than 30 days from your preferred date. With this measurement, VA North Texas is doing far better than any other VA in our region and much better than the nationwide VA average.

To further address the many challenging VA issues you face, we are working in partnership with retired Marine Col. Bill Dwiggins and retired Army Colonel Chris Martin as they establish the North Texas "MyVA Communities" Board to serve Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, and Denton counties with more than 320,000 Veterans.

The North Texas "MyVA Communities" is a collaborative partnership between VA and its communities, Veterans, Veteran advocates, service organizations, resource providers, and other stakeholders to establish and guide regional Veteran initiatives. It is led by a local Veteran engagement board and co-chaired by respected leaders with experience serving Veterans.

VA North Texas is proud of the health care we provide to Veterans. The physicians, nurses, and staff who work here – and more than 30 percent of our workforce are Veterans themselves – believe we offer high quality, safe care using the most advanced technology and equipment available.

Thank you for choosing VA North Texas for your health care needs.

Sincerely,

**Jeffery L. Milligan**  
Director



Changing lives.  
One Veteran at a time.

VA North Texas served more than 117,000 Veterans in FY2015 with almost 1.4 million outpatient visits. It is the second most complex VA facility in the nation, and our world-renown clinicians and researchers drive the technical quality of our health care services and programs.

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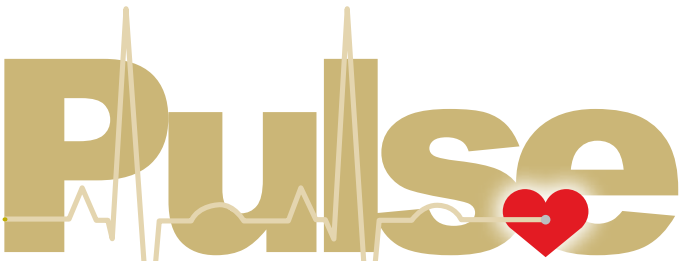
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**Pulse** is published for Veterans living in North Texas and Southern Oklahoma. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to: [ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov](mailto:ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov).



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(below) During his visit to the Dallas VA Medical Center, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Bob McDonald (center) met with President of the Veterans Resource Center and Marine Corps Veteran Ken Watterson (left) and retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Richard E. Carey.

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“This FDA-approved, first-of-its-kind treatment offers a neuroscience-based approach to the treatment of obesity, differentiating it from traditional, weight loss surgical options.”

**Dr. Sachin Kukreja**  
Bariatric Surgery director at VA North Texas Health Care System

For more information about vBloc® Therapy or other surgical weight loss options, contact the Bariatric Surgery Department at 214-857-0460 or your local VA MOVE! Program.

This summer, VA North Texas Health Care System became the first VA medical facility and the second hospital in the country to successfully deploy vBloc® Therapy, a scientifically advanced weight loss system.

The therapy involves a pacemaker-like implant called the Maestro® Rechargeable System, which intermittently impedes intra-abdominal vagus nerve signals. More simply put, it blocks the transmission of messages between the brain and stomach involving food intake and processing.

“There are currently many options for patients trying to lose weight. Some involve behavior modification, others involve pharmaceuticals or even surgery,” said Sachin Kukreja, M.D., who is also an assistant professor of Surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. “It is important to remember our brains and stomachs are intimately connected, most notably by the vagus nerve. For patients pursuing surgery, vBloc® allows successful surgical weight loss without the need for anatomic alterations or food restrictions that accompany other operations. This opens a new door in the surgical weight loss arena.”

## Weight Loss Goes High-Tech and Minimally Invasive

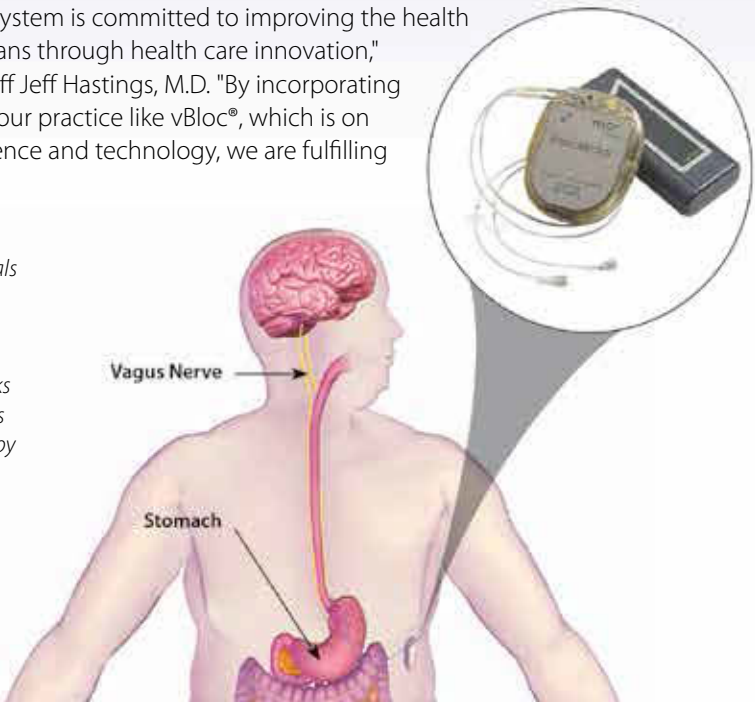
The Maestro System is wireless and customizable to meet the needs of a patient's changing lifestyle. The implant procedure is typically minimally invasive and performed on an outpatient basis, and does not alter or restrict the patient's anatomy. Instead, it works by reducing the stomach's capacity, making patients feel fuller, faster. Additionally, the signals from the stomach to the brain are blocked, resulting in overall reduced hunger.

In January 2015, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the Maestro System for use in adults with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 to 45 kg/m2 or a BMI of 35 to 39.9 kg/m2 with a related health condition such as diabetes, sleep apnea, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol levels, and those who have tried to lose weight in a supervised weight management program within the past five years.

This type of therapy is not appropriate for patients with cirrhosis of the liver, high blood pressure in the veins of the liver, enlarged veins in the esophagus, or a significant hiatal hernia. It is also not recommended for those who need magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), have permanently implanted, electrical medical devices, or need a diathermy procedure using heat.

VA North Texas Health System is committed to improving the health and well-being of Veterans through health care innovation,” said Interim Chief of Staff Jeff Hastings, M.D. “By incorporating treatment options into our practice like vBloc®, which is on the leading edge of science and technology, we are fulfilling that promise.” ★

*The vagus nerve sends signals between the brain and the stomach that control the sensation of hunger. vBloc Therapy intermittently blocks those signals. Many patients who have used vBloc Therapy report feeling full longer.*



“The ultimate goal of this research is to work with each Veteran and enable him or her to improve their quality of life and optimize their physical functioning.”

**Dr. Thiru Annaswamy**  
Staff physician in the Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Service

*(left) Dr. Annaswamy working with Army Veteran George Lawrence.*

## VA North Texas Explores Virtual Tele-Rehab

Physicians at the Dallas VA Medical Center are working on a research project to combine telemedicine and physical rehabilitation to provide Veterans with faster, easier, more convenient access to rehabilitation services.

“With our colleagues at the University of Texas at Dallas, we are researching the potential of changing the way we communicate with and provide care for our Veterans,” said Thiru Annaswamy, M.D., a staff physician in the Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Service. “The use of telemedicine in today's health care world has spread rapidly and is now becoming integrated into daily operations of hospitals, specialty departments, home health agencies, and private physician offices. We see Cyber Rehab as another potential breakthrough for the benefit of our Nation's heroes.”

Using real-time video, 3-D computer-generated worlds, and force-feedback "haptic" devices, this research project is exploring and evaluating a new and enhanced type of rehabilitation session that will take place between patients and therapists over high-speed networks.

Already approved by the VA North Texas Institutional Review Board, this experimental system, called VIRTESH (Virtual Reality based TElerehabilitation System with Haptics), could soon allow disabled Veterans to virtually connect with rehabilitation specialists and

receive physical therapy evaluation and treatment without being in the same room. Even if located remotely, the therapist will still be able to evaluate the patient and provide real-time feedback, instruction, and motivation, and ensure patients are doing their exercises properly and safely.

“The Dallas VA Medical Center will soon begin field trials for eligible Veterans with shoulder and/or arm disabilities,” said Dr. Annaswamy, who is also a professor with the Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. “The ultimate goal of this research is to work with each Veteran and enable him or her to improve their quality of life and optimize their physical functioning.”

Remote health care technology does not replace routine medical appointments; rather, it allows health care providers to deliver more personalized and efficient patient care.

VA telemedicine is already routine in many areas including diabetic retinopathy and mental health, and for patients with chronic medical conditions such as hypertension, high blood pressure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It has become increasingly popular with Veterans because it saves time plus helps avoid traffic and parking hassles. ★





Navy Veteran Edd M. Taylor got his flu shot from Rita Ighehon, R.N. at the Dallas VA Medical Center's Flu Central.

# Flu Season It's Time Again for Your Flu Shot!

Each year, people at risk of severe, even life-threatening influenza refuse the flu shot. The reasons vary, but among the most frequent excuses health care providers hear are “I never get the flu,” “the shot gave me the flu,” or simply, “I don’t like shots.”

If you say you have not had the flu, count yourself lucky. Frequently, younger people have less severe cases of flu and misdiagnose symptoms as a cold or a few sniffles. But as we age, our immune systems become slower to respond to attacks by fast-growing viruses.

Within 24 hours, each flu virus multiplies into a billion equally aggressive and dangerous flu viruses. The virus continues to reproduce and spread, destroying new cells in your upper respiratory tree at an astonishing rate. After two days, enough damage has been done that you get a sore throat and feel achy. Your body also responds by raising your temperature and increasing sinus and pulmonary secretions.

During the next two weeks, the virus in your system is the most dangerous. This is

especially true for people whose immune systems are not fully developed, like children, the elderly, those who are weak, tired, or rundown, and individuals who are immune-compromised or immune-suppressed. The fevers and sputum production at this time require a lot of energy and liquids. Even worse, it is at this point bacteria can invade the lungs causing

dangerous bacterial pneumonia. This places an even greater strain on your body as your temperature again rises, lungs become congested, and respiration becomes difficult.

For someone whose body is already suffering chronic lung, metabolic, or heart disease, your body does not have extra energy to fight this new, very aggressive bacterial attack. It is during this time people need to go to an emergency room or clinic for evaluation, possibly be admitted for hospital care to avoid serious complications or even death.

Around 40,000 Americans die of flu each year and more than 100,000 must be hospitalized. There is no count of how many miss work, school, or perhaps important social events.

After two weeks, you begin to improve as your immune system finally fights back against the invading virus with a very specific antibody. But while the acute flu symptoms subside, your body now starts to rebuild tissues and the energy reserves. Recovery can take another two to three weeks during which you feel unmotivated, weak, and tired.

People who have suffered with the flu can testify to those who refuse the vaccine that they do not know how bad it really is. VA health care professionals have the

responsibility to protect Veterans against the flu with the best that health care science has to offer. Vaccination is very effective in shortening the duration of illness, decreasing the severity of illness, decreasing the need for hospitalization, and most importantly, decreasing flu deaths.

For people who believe the vaccine gave them the flu, there are basically three ways this can appear to happen. First, vaccinations are generally given during the fall. Every year in September, three major viruses spread through north Texas before the flu even arrives.

These viruses cause colds that can at times appear to be flu. But, common colds are much milder by comparison. It is impossible for the vaccine material to give you the flu. It is a “dead” vaccine and cannot make anyone sick.

Second, some people may have a reaction to the vaccine as if it was “live.” The body responds to the invasion of vaccine material by increasing the body temperature as well as nasal and lung secretions.

This may be interpreted as the flu, but is it really the flu? No, this mild response only lasts a few days. Once the body reacts to it, the material is consumed and the body relaxes. The vaccine is definitely not transmissible and will definitely not make anyone else sick.

However, experts agree if you have this type of response to a “dead” vaccine, your body will react strenuously to the real flu and suffer a very serious flu infection. These individuals really do need to be vaccinated.

Lastly, sometimes the match between the vaccine flu strains and the actual, circulating flu strains is not very good. Therefore, the vaccine does not provide much protection. It also takes a few weeks to achieve full protection from the vaccine so you may get infected with the flu or another respiratory virus in that period of time.

“Even though the flu vaccine is not perfect and may not prevent every case of the

flu, it is the best tool we have right now to help prevent serious infections and flu deaths in our Veterans,” said James Cutrell, M.D., Infectious Disease physician. When you are not vaccinated, the flu can attack and destroy upper respiratory tissue unchallenged for nearly two weeks. Hospitalizations and death occur during this time.

How does the flu vaccine work and why is it the best way to protect against the flu? With a natural flu virus infection, it takes two weeks for the body to build enough immunity. During these two weeks, the body is being attacked by a growing number of flu virus. But, when a person is vaccinated, the vaccine kick-starts the

body into producing specific antibody supported immunity. After two weeks, the body has not only produced antibody that can specifically attack the flu virus; but, it has also made factory-like cells that can produce huge amounts of antibody in a couple of days when needed.

The good news is when the body is exposed to real flu virus, the body fights back very effectively from the time of viral invasion. The virus rarely gets enough of a head start to make the patient sick for even a day. Most people do not even know that they have been exposed to flu. Vaccine-produced antibody is a very effective first line defense for the body. ★

## Veterans who should seriously consider vaccination are:

- Over 50 years of age.
- Residents of long-term facilities.
- Veterans with long-term health problems of the heart, lungs, asthma, kidneys, or diabetes and other metabolic diseases.
- Veterans with muscle or nerve disorders involving swallowing or breathing.
- Veterans with weakened immune systems.
- Women Veterans who may be pregnant during the flu season.

For more information, contact the VANTHCS Preventive Medicine Program at 214-857-1572.

“Most people who have personally had the flu can testify to how bad it made them feel and welcome the flu shot to reduce the chance it happens again. Flu vaccination has been shown to be effective at shortening the duration of illness, decreasing the severity of illness, decreasing the need for hospitalization, and most importantly, decreasing flu deaths.”

Dr. James Cutrell, Infectious Disease physician at VA North Texas Health Care System





## Cover Story

# Rowing to a New Sport at 35<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Dallas

**e**xhibition typically means a demonstration of a particular skill and for Veteran athletes at the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) in Dallas that meant trying their hand at rowing.

Co-presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the NVWG is a rehabilitation and wheelchair sports program empowering Veterans with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, amputations, and other neurological injuries to live more active and healthy lives through wheelchair sports and recreation.

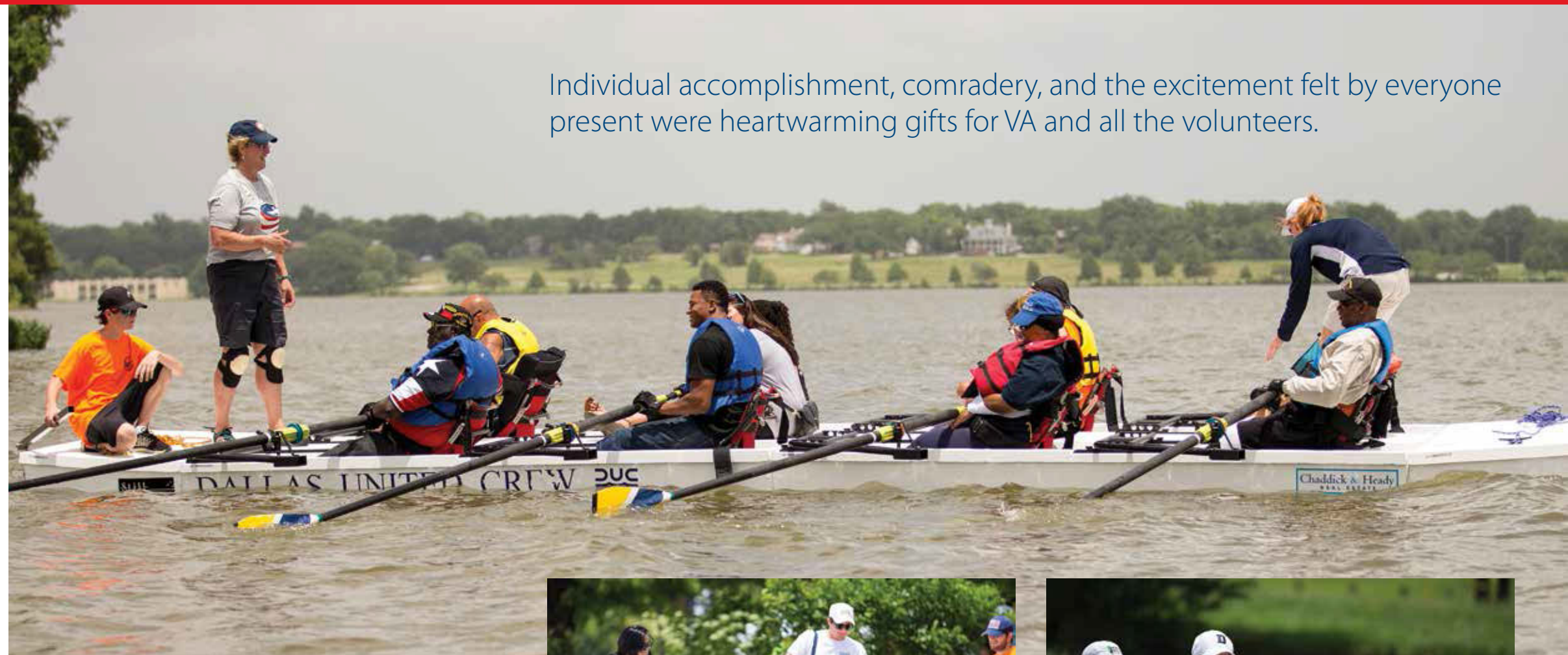
Each summer, Veterans from across the United States, including a team from Great Britain, travel to a new community hosting the NVWG. The 2015 Games were hosted by the VA North Texas Health Care System.

During the week, Veterans compete in 18 wheelchair sports events while providing encouragement and mentoring for new Veterans. Veterans at the Games truly educate newly disabled Veterans on what is possible and those witnessing the events realize that limitations are only a state of mind.

The sprawling White Rock Lake northeast of downtown Dallas was the setting for this year's NVWG exhibition sport where approximately 70 athletes took to the water in either an 8-person rowing barge or one-to-two man rowing boats. Dallas United Crew, a nonprofit, community rowing club, assisted with the exhibition and provided the tools and equipment necessary for an afternoon of tranquility and upper body skill on the lake.

"We are proud to be the first organization in the U.S. to build and provide a specially adapted rowing barge," said Belinda McDonnell, Dallas United Crew president. "We anticipated around 20 to 30 athletes today, but are thrilled that close to 70 decided to come give it a try. Working with the VA has given us some wonderful opportunities to provide adaptive skills and training which is a strong part of our mission."

Veteran Athlete William "Bif" Fry from Beaver Creek, Ohio anxiously waited for his turn on the 8-person rowing barge. "This is my



Individual accomplishment, comradery, and the excitement felt by everyone present were heartwarming gifts for VA and all the volunteers.

first time rowing, and every time I come to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, I like to try the exhibitions. It is always fun to see what skill you might like."

"It certainly required more technique than I imagined; but, I would like to continue rowing when I get home with a club," said Chris Brewer, an athlete from Pensacola, Fla. and first time attendee after he rowed for the first time.

Some Veteran athletes had done similar sports such as kayaking before. Kenneth Brookins from Minneapolis commented, "I am curious to see if rowing is more comfortable to me than kayaking." Jessica Greene from San Jose, Calif., said she was introduced to rowing at the VA Summer Games in San Diego and was excited to try her hand at rowing again. "It was a little more challenging this time around coordinating with seven other individuals on the rowing barge," said Greene, but she looks forward to working with her local VA to obtain some of the necessary equipment to make it a comfortable sport for her.

A recruiter for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was also on site to identify a few athletes for future adaptive rowing training. Rene Peterson from Kansas City, Mo. anxiously awaited his turn to try the two-man rowing canoe and said he would be interested in classifying for the Rio games.

Pam Kelly from Clearwater, Fla. already knew about a rowing club in the process of starting near her hometown so she was wanted to determine her skill level. ★ *Jessica Jacobsen*



## Upcoming VA Adaptive Sports Events

National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic | **April 3-8, 2016, Snowmass Village, CO**

National Veterans Golden Age Games | **July 10-14, 2016, Detroit, MI**

National Veterans Wheelchair Games | **June 27 – July 2, 2016, Salt Lake City, UT**

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival | **October 10-16, 2016, TBA (Southeast U.S.)**

**If you are interested in participating in one of VA's Adaptive Sports Programs, contact Recreation Therapy at 214-857-1273, 903-583-6396, or 817-730-0000 (x23327).**



## Tyler VA Doubles its Footprint

On May 29, VA North Texas Health Care System opened a second VA clinic and doubled its footprint in Tyler. The 10,000 square foot facility, located at 7916 S. Broadway Avenue, expands VA services for approximately 7,200 Tyler-area Veterans from Smith, Rusk, Henderson, Van Zandt, Rains, and Wood counties. A new optometry clinic and specialty care, including mental health, homeless services, diabetic counseling, and expanded telehealth services, are now concentrated from the current Golden Road location.

Call toll-free 855-375-6930 for an appointment.



(left to right) Acting VISN 17 Director Wendell Jones, M.D.; Tyler District 6 Councilman John Nix; VA North Texas Assistant Director for Outpatient Services Jennifer Purdy; U.S. Representative Louie Gohmert; and retired Army Lt. Col. Jim Snow cut the ribbon of the new Tyler VA Primary Care Outpatient Clinic.

## VA Transformation

### Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic Throws Baby Shower for New Moms

In September, the Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic hosted its 2nd Annual Federal Women's Program Baby Shower. Coordinated by the Fort Worth Federal Women's Program Manager Melissa Miller, Fort Worth Women's Health Program, and Fort Worth Voluntary Services, 22 women Veterans enjoyed a fun-filled afternoon with education, games, and friendship. Enrolled in the clinic's Maternity Program, the participants had all either recently given birth or were expecting.

Representatives from more than 10 government agencies including VA North Texas Health Care System; the Texas Health and Human Services Commission; and the Department of Agriculture's Women, Infants and Children Program were present and distributed information about available resources.

The new moms also received cribs, strollers, diapers, and gift bags filled with newborn essentials courtesy of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Ladies Auxiliary, Crowley VFW Post 6872, Weatherford

VFW Post 4746, American Legion Auxiliary 12th District of Texas, Meador Dodge Chrysler Jeep, and Blessed Tiny Toes Safe Home.

According to VA, women make up nearly 11.6 percent of the Veterans serving in the current conflicts. VA North Texas offers a variety of services especially designed to meet the needs of women Veterans in a concerned, compassionate, and comprehensive manner. In addition to Fort Worth, healthcare for women Veterans is available in Dallas, Bonham, Tyler, and at Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Bridgeport, Denton, Granbury, Greenville, and Sherman.

Contact Women Veterans Program Manager Leslie Snowden-Crawford, R.N. at 800-849-3597, ext. 71938 or Leslie.Snowden-Crawford@va.gov for assistance. She advises and advocates for women Veterans, and can help coordinate primary care and specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health. ★

"Some of the women in our program are homeless or at-risk for homelessness, unemployed, involved in unhealthy relationships, coping with an unplanned pregnancy, or cannot afford necessary care items for their child. Everyone left the baby shower smiling or crying tears of joy, full of gratitude, and with renewed hope. It was a privilege to help provide resources to these Veterans."

Auyama Wright, Women's Health Social Worker and one of the event's organizers

## Bonham: Celebrating Veterans and Their Extraordinary Sacrifices

Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center and the City of Bonham hosted its Annual Regional Veterans Day Program on November 5, 2015 at the Bonham High School.

Bonham was one of 51 sites, and one of four in Texas, chosen nationally by VA to host a regional Veterans Day program. Now, in its 25th year, this event serves as a grand opportunity for Bonham and surrounding communities to honor Veterans and is the perfect educational opportunity for students to learn more about Veterans and their sacrifices for our freedom throughout our Nation's history.

To kick-off the celebration, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Honor Guard presented the colors. The Bonham High School Band performed followed by a rifle demonstration by the PVA Lone Star Chapter.

Guest speaker, retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Dana Bowman, had planned to arrive by parachute, but inclement weather forced a change of plans. Bowman was a Special Forces Soldier and a member of the U.S. Army's elite parachute team, the Golden Knights. He is a double amputee; losing his legs in an accident during the annual Golden Knights training in Arizona in 1994.

Rather than crisscrossing, the two skydivers slammed into each other at a combined speed of 300 miles per hour. Bowman's teammate, Sgt. Jose Aguillon, died instantly. Bowman's legs were severed from his body, one above the knee and one below the knee. Bowman's parachute opened on impact. He was taken to a hospital in Phoenix where doctors closed his leg wounds and stopped his internal bleeding.

Nine months later, Bowman turned this tragedy into a triumph when he became the first double amputee to re-enlist in the Army. He re-enlisted with Airborne-style, skydiving with his commander into the ceremony, making his dream a reality. Bowman's achievement is yet another example of how Veterans thrive under adverse circumstances. ★





Photo courtesy of Dana Bowman



## PACTs Make the Difference on Polk Street

Army Veteran Leroy Naybors talks with Lynette Lane, L.V.N., a member of his Patient Aligned Care Team at the Polk Street VA Annex Clinic in Dallas. A PACT, consists of a primary care provider, registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse, and an administrative clerk, is designed so Veterans may work with a specific health care team to plan care and life-long health and wellness. Polk offers primary care, laboratory, and EKG services plus ample parking, faster check-in, and an on-site pharmacist to answer questions.



# IT'S YOUR CALL

Confidential help for Veterans and their families

**1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**

Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to 838255

**Veterans Crisis Line**





MOVE! Clinic Coordinator Karen Armour, R.D.N., L.D. (left) and Nutrition Food Clerk Taneka McNeal discuss the nutrition content of a patient's lunch. If you want to learn more about healthy diet options, speak with a registered dietitian at 214-857-0078.

# Diets: Quick Won't Stick!

Weight is a tough issue. The majority of us realize how important it is to keep our weight in check. However, when we set our minds on something, we usually want it now and fast. Our idea of wanting something fast is understandable because in today's world, calorie-packed food comes fast and easy.

Unfortunately, quick weight loss usually does not work in the long term. In addition, losing weight too fast may result in regaining more weight than you lost. This creates frustration and discourages you from trying to lose weight.

In order to have successful weight loss, you should strive for a slow and steady loss. Besides, reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and can help prevent and control many diseases and conditions.

When setting a weight loss goal, starting off with a small achievable goal can go a long way. Aiming to lose ten pounds initially may seem less intimidating and more realistic than aiming to lose sixty pounds. Smaller goals can be tracked and evaluated sooner.

Keep in mind that once your initial goal is met, you can always start a new one. When setting a goal, ask yourself: "What should my initial weight loss goal be?" and "How fast should I plan to lose this weight?"

A good starting point is to set an initial weight loss goal of ten percent of what you currently weigh. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, set a weight loss goal of 20 pounds. If you weigh 180 pounds, try to lose 18 pounds.

How fast should this weight loss occur? A steady and healthy weight loss is one to

two pounds per week. This could lead to a weight loss of eight to 16 pounds in two months.

**Losing weight is twofold: eat less and move more. One pound of weight equals 3,500 calories. This means in order to lose one pound per week, you only need to cut back 500 calories per day.**

To accomplish your goal of cutting 500 calories each day may actually be easier than it sounds. This goal can be achieved by eating healthy foods, eating smaller portions which will cut down on the calories consumed, and increasing your physical activity which will increase the calories you burn.

Why starve yourself if you can lose weight by simply cutting back on a few calories and increasing your activity level? Your best friends when it comes to losing weight and keeping the weight off are healthy foods and eating smaller portions, slowly.

Remember, if you want to lose weight, quick will not stick! Aim for a slow and steady weight loss and start with a realistic, achievable goal. Do not be afraid to set a goal. You are in control of your diet, your exercise, and your weight.

The bottom line for achieving a healthy weight is to exercise, forget the trendy diets, turn off the television, skip the sugared drinks, and think before you eat. Finally, the health benefits of staying at a healthy weight are huge and worth the effort. So, move more, choose smaller portions, and eat more slowly. ★

**For more information about making diet and physical activity changes, contact MOVE! Clinic Coordinator Karen Armour, R.D. at 214-857-0094.**

# Don't Tiptoe around Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition in which the body does not effectively use sugar. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 29 million Americans have diabetes. Of those, more than 8 million have not yet been diagnosed.

Diabetes occurs when you have too much glucose, or sugar, in your blood. Glucose comes from the foods you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps glucose get into your cells to give them energy. With Type 1 diabetes, your body does not make sufficient insulin. With Type 2 diabetes, the more common type, your body does not make or use insulin well. Without enough insulin, the glucose stays in your blood.

Signs of early diabetes include increased thirst and urination, unexplained weight loss, blurred vision, and numbness or tingling in your hands or feet. Diabetes is not contagious. People cannot "catch" it from each other.

Over time, uncontrolled diabetes can cause nerve damage, blindness, kidney damage, and heart disease that can lead to death. High blood sugar also causes blood vessels to narrow and harden, reducing blood flow essential to the healing process. Poor circulation damages peripheral nerves, causing a condition known as diabetic neuropathy or the loss of sensation in the arms and legs. The loss of feeling - including the ability to feel pain - means a small cut on your leg or a blister on your foot can go unnoticed and untreated until it has become infected.

"No matter how small or superficial a wound is, you should not ignore it if you have diabetes," said Associate Chief of Staff for Ambulatory Care Raul A. Rivera, M.D. "Often, the first sign of a diabetic foot ulcer that patients notice is drainage on their socks. Redness and swelling may also be indications. If you suspect you have an ulcer, contact your doctor right away."

People with diabetes are far more likely to have a foot or leg amputated than other people. As a diabetic, you should check your feet every day for any sores or redness. Always wear properly fitting shoes, never go barefoot, report foot problems immediately to your VA North Texas Health Care System health care provider, and at least once a year, have them check your feet.

**If you have diabetes in your family or suspect you might have symptoms of diabetes, talk with your health care provider at VA North Texas Health Care System about a Blood Glucose Test.**

This is a laboratory test that tells exactly how much glucose, or sugar, you have in your blood when it is drawn. Normal blood glucose levels should be between 70 and 110.

Another test used to measure the glucose level in your blood is a Glycosylated Hemoglobin Test (HgbA1C). This test is used to check how much glucose has been in your bloodstream over the past two to three months, and is useful to check how well your diabetes has been controlled with treatment.

Medication such as pills and/or insulin may be needed to lower your blood glucose level, but the most important treatment for diabetes is a proper diet, adjusted to your body needs and activity level. Talk with your VA North Texas Health Care System health care provider or registered dietitian for advice. ★

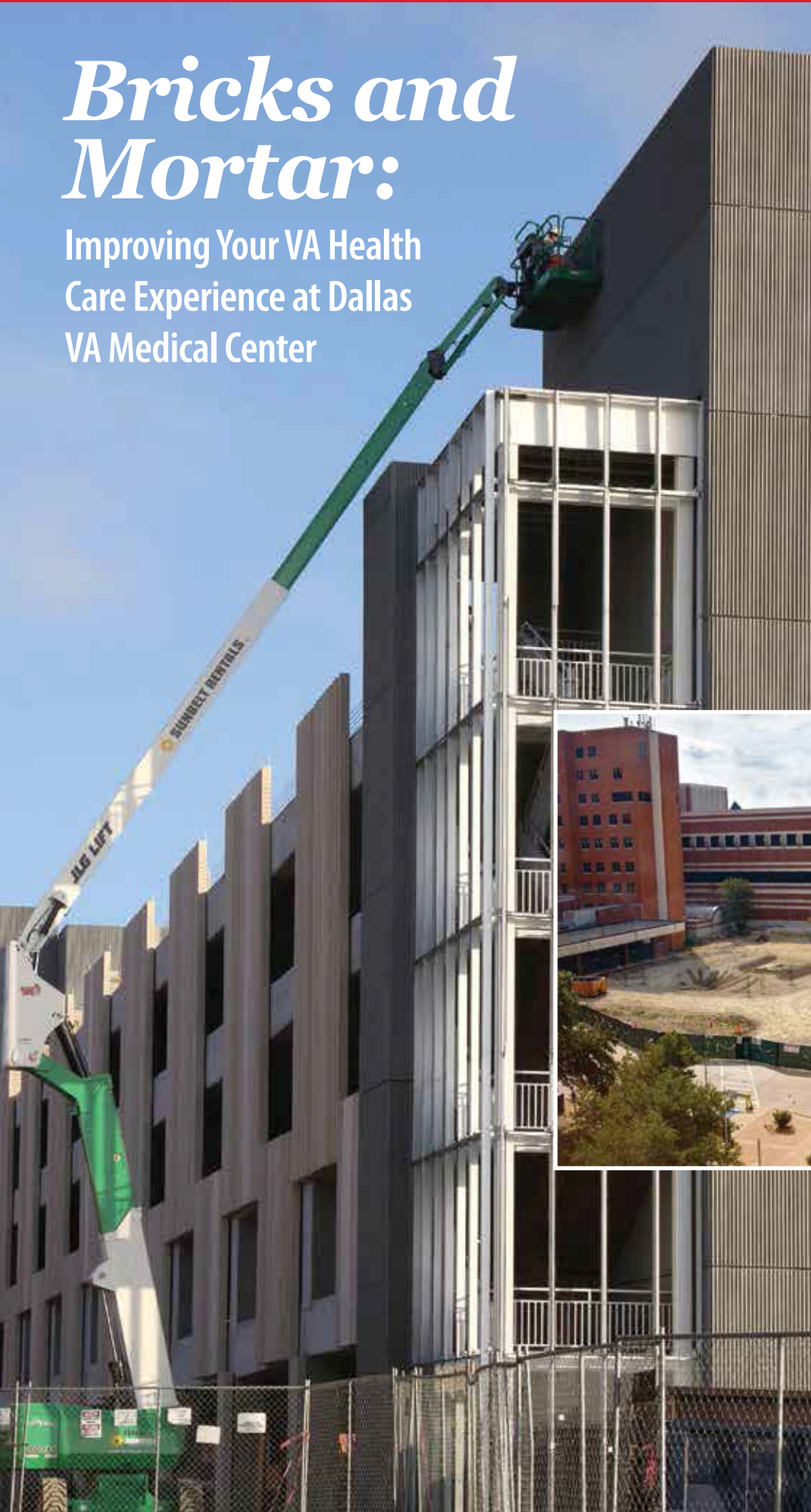
"Adults with diabetes need to take special care of their feet. They are at risk for foot injuries due to numbness caused by nerve damage and low blood flow to the legs and feet," said Dr. Elizabeth George-Ninan, a primary care physician, examines Army Veteran Walter R. Brown's feet for complications from diabetes.





# Bricks and Mortar:

Improving Your VA Health Care Experience at Dallas VA Medical Center



**p**arking at the Dallas VA Medical Center is, well, bad. But work is underway to improve the situation.

First, VA North Texas Health Care System purchased about 12 acres of nearby land from the Dallas Independent School District for pending construction projects and to help address parking shortages. A 1,000-car parking garage on the east side of campus is almost finished, and construction of a third parking garage with 400 spaces starts right after that. The expansion of the Emergency Department is picking up steam. This project, expected to be completed in 2017, will add more than 29,000 square feet and renovate almost 4,500 square feet of space.

Next year, construction will begin on an Inpatient Bed Project to renovate two nursing units and increase the total number of beds.



Construction on an expanded Emergency Department (above) is expected to be completed in 2017. This project will add more than 29,000 square feet and renovate almost 4,500 square feet of space.

A second parking garage with 1,000 spaces (left) is almost finished on the campus of the Dallas VA Medical Center. When it opens, construction of a third garage with 400 spaces will begin.

In early 2018, construction of a new Ambulatory Surgical Center is expected to start. This 26,000-square-foot, surgical center will be home to most of Day Surgery along with pain management, oral surgery, ENT, ophthalmology, and other related specialties.

VA North Texas has several other Dallas campus projects in the works including expansion of mental health, cardiology, and long-term, spinal cord injury care.

## Tyler

This past May, VA North Texas opened a new Primary Care Clinic in Tyler at 7916 S. Broadway Avenue. The 10,000-square-foot facility greatly expanded primary care services for area Veterans. The older clinic on Golden Road now has a new optometry clinic and focuses on specialty services such as mental health, homeless Veteran services, and diabetic counseling. Preliminary designs to combine the clinics have been finished, and a new 50,000-square-foot clinic is expected to open in 2020.

## Bonham

Bonham's Ambulatory Care, located in building 2, is set for renovation and expansion. This upcoming project will add about 16,500 square feet, renovate 12,000 square feet of current space, and also expand the laboratory.

## New Locations

Recently, a contract was signed for a new VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Plano, Texas. Expected to see its first patients next spring, the 10,000-square-foot medical facility will offer primary care, mental health, tele-medicine, laboratory, and x-ray services.

Several other community-based outpatient clinics are being planned for towns surrounding Dallas and Fort Worth. ★

## Good News!

Since April 2014, VA North Texas has hired 65 more physicians and 225 new nurses!

### Veterans who work at VA North Texas Health Care System share best kept secrets, tips, and the inside scoop on VA health care programs and services.

*"I got an eye infection serving in the Gulf; it was serious enough the Army thought I would lose sight in my eye. When no one else could diagnose or treat me, VA knew exactly what it was and continues to provide me with free eye exams, treatment, and medications. VA also offers free eyeglasses."*

Army Veteran **Ricardo Simpson**, Mail Clerk

*"VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program provides a way for Veterans who have had some bumps in the road to get mental health support, an individual rehabilitation plan, and a way back into the workforce."*

Army Veteran **LeeJay Walker**, CWT Logistics Specialist

*"Many Veterans are eligible for free prescriptions while others only pay \$8 or \$9 for a 30-day supply."*

Navy Veteran **Andrew Auerbach, M.D.**, Emergency Department Section Chief

*"VA offers free flu shots and free screening for hypertension, hyperlipidemia, breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers, HIV, HPV, and hepatitis B."*

Army Veteran **Harvis Shepard, Jr.**, Nurse Assistant Escort



*"VA offers women Veterans gender-specific health care like hormone replacement therapy and pap smears plus maternity, infertility, substance abuse, and mental health treatment."*

Army Veteran **Tressa Jackson**, Assistant Chief HIMS



*"VA provides free care for mental and physical health conditions related to Military Sexual Trauma."*

Army Veteran **Isaiah Johnson**, Surgical Services Office Automation Assistant



*"Any Veteran rated 70% service-connected or more qualifies for nursing home care."*

Air Force Veteran **Christopher Martinez**, Health Systems Specialist



*"You can refill your prescriptions fast and easy on VA's My HealtheVet website, www.myhealth.va.gov. It also lets you secure message with your doc."*

Air Force Veteran **Shauna Jones**, Social Worker

*"If you qualify, VA will reimburse you for your mileage, special transportation when it's approved by your VA health care provider, and in specialized situations, a taxi or hired car to get to VA care."*

Army Veteran **Noel Ramirez**, Sterile Processing Supervisor

*"VA social workers can help with personal or family problems, and offer lots of great information about VA, government, and community resources."*

Air Force Veteran **Donald Yeater**, Supervisory Personnel Security Specialist

*"Dallas VA Medical Center has free, on-site childcare at Carousel Academy for Veterans with scheduled clinical appointments."*

Marine Veteran **Romano Ramirez**, Human Resources Assistant

*"VA's HUD-VASH Program helps homeless Veterans and their families find stable housing. This includes referrals to VA primary care as well as services such as mental health or substance abuse treatment, income assistance, employment support, disability benefits, and credit repair and skills for money management. No Veteran should be without a place to call home."*

Navy Veteran **Ronald Wilson**, Retail Floor Lead





# VA Health Care Near You

Dallas VA Medical Center  
Bonham – Sam Rayburn  
Memorial Veterans Center

800-849-3597 or 214-742-8387  
800-924-8387 or 903-583-2111

## Outpatient Clinics

Bridgeport	940-683-2538
Dallas – Polk Street	214-372-8100
Denton	940-891-6350
Fort Worth	800-443-9672 or 817-730-0000
Granbury	817-326-3902
Greenville	903-450-1143
Sherman	903-487-0477
Tyler Primary Care	855-375-6930 or 903-266-5900
Tyler Specialty Care	855-375-6930 or 903-590-3050

## Vet Centers

Dallas County Vet Center	972-288-8030 or 972-288-8030
Dallas Vet Center	214-361-5896 or 877-927-8387
Fort Worth Vet Center	817-921-9095 or 817-921-9095
Tarrant County Vet Center	817-274-0981 or 817-274-0981

## Telephone Care

Prescription Refills	888-364-5227 or <a href="http://www.myhealth.va.gov">www.myhealth.va.gov</a>
Telecare	800-677-8289
Telenurse	888-252-9970

## Outpatient Pharmacies

Dallas	214-857-0556
Bonham	903-583-6255
Fort Worth	817-882-6000
Tyler	903-583-6255
Spinal Cord Injury	214-857-1782

## More VA Services

VA Benefits	800-827-1000
Health Care Benefits	877-222-8387
VA Health Resource Center	866-393-9132
Dallas Fisher House	214-857-4401 or 214-854-4400
Chaplain Service	
Bonham	903-583-6280
Dallas	214-857-1070
Fort Worth	817-335-2202 (x23330)
Recreation Therapy	
Bonham	903-583-6396
Dallas	214-857-1270
Fort Worth	817-730-0000 (x23327)
Social Work	214-857-0388 or 214-857-0367
Women's Clinic	
Dallas	214-857-4800
Fort Worth	817-730-0000 (x23126)
Voluntary Services	
Bonham	903-583-6283
Dallas	214-857-1060
Fort Worth	817-730-0078
Comprehensive Homeless Center	214-857-4182

## Crisis Hotlines

Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)
Women Veterans Hotline	855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)
Combat Call Center	877-WAR-VETS (877-927-8387)
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans	877-424-3838

## How many Veterans work at VA North Texas Health Care System?

**1,586 Veterans**  
(30.81% of workforce)

**594 Disabled Veterans**  
(21.21% of workforce)

**119 Veterans hired in FY15**



## New Plano VA Clinic Coming Soon

A new Community Based Outpatient Clinic for Veterans living in Collin and surrounding counties will open in Plano in 2016. The 10,000-square-foot facility near the Medical Center of Plano will provide primary care, mental health, telemedicine, imaging, and laboratory services closer to where Veterans live.



**ONE THING I'D LIKE TO SAY TO ALL OF YOU IS YOU'RE NOT CRAZY.**

I had a complete meltdown with PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder). I thought I was losing my mind. I'd never been out of control before, and it was hard to admit I needed help, but I wanted my old self back. I've gotten that and more. I'm strong. I'm healthy. I have tools, I have knowledge, and I have strength and courage to deal with it. I'm doing just fine.

RON WHITCOMB: 607 US ARMY 1988-1989 SOUND LEADER, VIETNAM

**ABOUTFACE**

PTSD TREATMENT CAN TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [WWW.PTSD.VA.GOV/ABOUTFACE](http://WWW.PTSD.VA.GOV/ABOUTFACE)